

# **Indiana Department of Environmental Management**

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*(Text does not include verbatim comments)*

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Thank you. I want to extend a welcome to all the members of ASPA who have come to this annual meeting to learn more about IDEM, our agency priorities and our environmental justice initiative. We here at IDEM are excited to be the first state agency this year to host your meeting for the purpose of learning more about each other.

Since most, if not all, of us in this room administer the business of the public, I'm sure most of you are aware that people too often perceive government as an obstacle to overcome, not as a partner in what they do. The phrase, "I'm from the government, and I'm here to help," is perceived more as an oxymoron and something to laugh at, than reality. One of our biggest challenges is to work on reversing how our customers, both voluntary and involuntary, think of us: to shift the paradigm from "obstacle" back to "public servant."

Our job is to demonstrate to those we serve that we really are there to help them accomplish their goals but in a way that protects the environment which, in turn, nurtures and adds to the quality of life for all of us.

As I think of IDEM's outstanding staff and learned more about your organization, I am encouraged that the commitments laid out in the ASPA Code of Ethics also reflect our commitment as public servants. The principles of the Code of Ethics radiate throughout our agency's priorities and goals. Yet it is the first principle, "Serve the Public Interest," that has the greatest connection with what we do here at IDEM. However, before I note the connections, I'd like to share with you IDEM's history.

State government in Indiana began 184 years ago in 1816. IDEM began 14 years ago. For 170 years there was no agency with the primary responsibility to oversee our environment. Now some people would say we could probably have survived without IDEM for another 170 years. But I don't think so. And I'll tell you why.

The genesis of IDEM came from a rib of the Indiana State Department of Health. Well . . . if not a rib then the legislative equivalent. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) had been created several years before that and more and more programs were being given to the states for local regulations and management. The state department of health was no longer suitable for administering all of those programs . . . a new agency was needed.

Realizing that IDEM is the toddler of state government helps us understand that the agency has had to grow up fast and that we are still learning each day how to better serve our many

customers throughout the state. One of the ways in which we demonstrate our newfound knowledge is through the establishment of agency priorities, which serve as our road map for the current 1999-2001 biennium. These priorities relate directly to the **commitments** of ASPA's first principle to "Serve the Public Interest."

Our current priorities are 1) Reducing Exposure to Toxics, 2) Partnering for Liveable Environments, 3) Communicating Environmental Information, and 4) Building a Better IDEM.

**ASPA's first commitment 1:** Exercise discretionary authority to promote the public interest, relates to what IDEM is trying to do with its first priority: Reducing Exposure to Toxics.

We are working to reduce exposure to toxics through education and outreach. In many ways this might be our most important goal. Let me highlight a couple of the specific projects we are beginning to identify in this area.

We are expanding our focus on children, where they spend their days and where they live. We are developing an integrated pest management pilot program and working with childcare facilities and schools to introduce them to integrated pest management practices. We are working to increase the number of facilities that participate in the 5-Star Childcare Facility program. We are also expanding our outreach program to teach parents environmental safety for their children.

We have also begun to look at the issue of asthma in the state and in conjunction with many people outside of our agency to get a better handle on the issue and the occurrence in Indiana. We are determining those areas in the state where asthma rates are abnormally high, and will work with government and private agencies to develop strategies for schools to use in the targeted areas.

We are also beginning programs to target sources of styrene and methylene chloride and to reduce the levels of these chemicals in our environment. We are building on our lead and mercury programs, and we working to expand the Governor's Toxic Reduction Challenge. We are working with the state chemist to hold workshops throughout the state. These are just a few of the new or expanded efforts we are making to reduce Hoosiers' exposure to toxics.

**Commitment # 7:** Assist citizens in their dealings with government ties directly to my agency's next priority is partnering with local communities for liveable environments. Our Community Relations office is working hard to improve accessibility and empowering local communities in environmental matters. Additionally, our various program areas will increase their efforts to deal with specific issues and environmental problems in communities.

We are working hard to develop ways to assist communities in environmental planning. Too often we in Indiana face problems that are the result of shortsightedness or poor planning. Too many communities don't have the tools and resources they need to include environmental issues in their growth plans. IDEM is beginning to work with local communities to assist them to make reasoned, careful choices about their environment and their future . . . choices that allow them to weigh environmental concerns against issues of growth and economic development.

We are improving and expanding our approach to environmental challenges through the watershed approach. IDEM's first pilot watershed program involves the Wildcat Creek watershed in North Central Indiana from Howard and Tipton counties to Tippecanoe County. We all know that environmental problems do not respect political boundaries. A plume of contaminants in a river doesn't recognize a county line or a town boundary. Environmental mitigation and protection require a comprehensive and collaborative approach, one that recognizes and works with a variety of programs and agencies. The watershed approach establishes a framework for coordinating and integrating a multitude of programs and resources. This type of approach directs the focus on water quality in a geographic area delineated by a watershed and reflects the realization that in order for all of the waters of the state to achieve the goal of designated uses for recreation, aquatic life support and drinking water supply, we must implement an integrated approach which includes a common information base. We hope to do this by mid-2001.

**ASPA's commitments # 3 & 6** recognizes and supports the public's right to know the public's business. And respond to the public in ways that are complete, clear, and easy to understand.

By Communicating Environmental Information, another one of IDEM's priorities, we are making information more accessible to Hoosiers as well as our employees to help them in their daily tasks. Sometimes someone in the agency will have developed great information and put it in a very usable form. However, somebody situated two floors away doesn't know about it even though it could be very useful to the employee's daily job. And almost always, if someone two floors away doesn't know about it, someone at the other end of the state is even more in the dark about it.

We are attacking these weaknesses to make the environmental information more accessible. We are also working to integrate various databases and make them known and easy to get to.

Recently, we went on line with an interactive permit guide that makes a tremendous amount of information about permitting easily accessible. That's really good news for businesses around the state.

We have also just completed an effort to improve and consolidate our file rooms and the information they contain. The files for our offices of Air, Water and Land are in one location – on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor of this building. We are exploring ways to make our files accessible electronically. We plan to put as much information as we can in IDEM's regional offices file rooms in Gary, Evansville and South Bend, too.

By Building a Better IDEM, our agency's last priority, we are examining how to work better and smarter as an agency. This priority is the foundation for accomplishing the goals of the other three priorities. We want to improve our work environment, in part, by doing more to make you and other Hoosiers more aware of what we do. We are also working hard to walk the walk as well as talk the talk.

IDEM is a leader in Governor O'Bannon's "Greening the Government" initiative. We have goals to buy and use more recycled materials on a regular basis. We are working hard at source

reduction for paper . . . and believe me . . . reducing the amount of paper in a bureaucracy as large as ours is no easy feat . . . but we will do it. We also plan to enhance and improve our use of the regional offices in Northwest Indiana, Southwest Indiana, and Northern Indiana.

Another effort under this priority is the formation of an internal team to look at achieving more consistency in the area of compliance and enforcement across the agency.

The purpose of having agency priorities is to make sure that we're appropriately focusing our attention and directing resources to the greatest needs of our customers. However, the priorities do not capture *all* of what IDEM does. There are some other internal and external initiatives that also relate to some of ASPA's other commitments.

For example, two years ago our staff recognized a need and formed the Multi- Cultural Concerns Committee (MCCC). This committee initiated a "needs assessment" in evaluating how diverse the staff of IDEM is and how aware employees are of the various cultures reflected by the many faces of their coworkers. In addition to the work of the MCCC, I, along with our senior management and Human Resources, have begun a "Diversity Matters" blitz campaign. It includes, among other things, the agency-wide distribution and posting of a monthly cultural diversity calendar and mandatory managerial diversity training. All of this helps us "oppose all forms of discrimination and harassment and promote affirmative action," which is your group's **Commitment # 2**.

Although some would say that IDEM has struggled to effectively "involve citizens in policy decision-making," the goal of ASPA's **Commitment # 4**, IDEM has instituted workgroups across the agency that are composed of various interest groups, including citizens, that provide necessary and invaluable input in rules and policy making.

A specific workgroup example is the Interim Environmental Justice Advisory Committee (IEJAC). This group is comprised of citizens, environmentalists, academics, and business industry representatives from across the state. Over the past six months, this advisory committee has been working diligently to develop a Strategic Plan that IDEM will operate from to ensure environmental justice in Indiana.

Over the past few years, the environmental justice movement has been recognized across the nation. Environmental justice is a top priority for IDEM. We are committed to *ensuring that no citizen or community within the State of Indiana, regardless of race, color, national origin, income, or geographic location, will bear a disproportionate share of the risk or consequences of environmental pollution or will be denied equal access to environmental benefits*. We recognize that in order to ensure the reality of environmental justice, every action and product of this agency must reflect the commitment outlined in our Environmental Performance Partnership Agreement with the U.S. EPA.

Last September, IDEM was awarded a State and Tribal Environmental Justice Grant ("EJ Grant") from U.S. EPA. The EJ Grant provides funding for IDEM to develop and implement its program to ensure environmental justice. In accepting the EJ Grant, we committed to achieving several goals and objectives; our goals are to:

1. Identify geographical areas of environmental justice concern.
2. Educate communities about environmental issues,... (the public's role as a participant in environmental decision making, and IDEM's statutory roles and responsibilities.)
3. Ensure IDEM staff is sensitive to EJ issues . . . and understands the relevance of those issues to their work.
4. In siting decisions, ensure all affected parties have the opportunity to communicate their concerns.
5. Evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of existing public processes for environmental decision-making.
6. Seek out and involve other agencies as it addresses issues related to EJ.
7. Implement an effective EJ Strategic Plan for the Department.

Our commitment to environmental justice also expresses our commitment to " exercise compassion, benevolence, fairness and optimism," your organization's **Commitment # 5**. A draft environmental justice strategic plan will soon be available and we will take it across the state to various Hoosier communities for feedback.

As I look again over this list of commitments, there's only one that I haven't covered - number eight (# 8): "Be prepared to make decisions that may not be popular." . . . Need I say more?

We have a lot of work cut out for ourselves at IDEM. But it needs to be done to make our hometowns and our state better places environmentally. We have made tremendous progress in cleaning up our environment since Rachel Carson wrote Silent Spring in 1962. I only hope that I can witness firsthand the progress in the decades ahead.

I also hope you have learned something from my speech about our agency and the role we play in protecting the environment, because as Harlan Cleveland wrote in the Christian Monitor:

"This is the first generation in the history of the world that finds that what people do to their natural environment is maybe more important than what the natural environment does to and for them. We also have some measuring sticks for change that we never had before. And, as always happens with knowledge, as soon as you know something, you have some responsibility."

Ladies and gentlemen, my speech today has left us, you and me, with some responsibility . . .to be the best public servants possible.

Now for questions and answers regarding IDEM's agency priorities and environmental justice initiative...